

April 29, 2002: Condition Sudan's Oil Revenues; Negotiate Self-Determination; And Secular Government

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Contact:

Lawrence J. Goodrich, Communications Director, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27

WASHINGTON - A just peace in Sudan is not possible unless the Khartoum regime is prevented from using the country's oil revenues to step up its brutal war against the south, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a federal agency advising the Administration and Congress, said in a report and recommendations released today. In its three years of studying Sudan's civil war, the Commission has found that the development of Sudan's oil wealth has become an increasingly important factor in the intensification of the conflict.

"The U.S. government should not push the parties into a cease-fire agreement that allows Khartoum to continue to build up its military," said Commission Chair Michael K. Young. The Commission recommended that any comprehensive cease-fire in Sudan be conditioned on placing the country's oil revenues in an internationally administered trust fund to be expended solely for developmental and humanitarian purposes on an equitable basis in both the north and the south. "A cease-fire without such an arrangement will make the regime far less likely to engage in good-faith bargaining over power-sharing," Chairman Young said.

In order to move Khartoum to the peace table, the Commission also urged the Administration and the Senate to support the House version of the Sudan Peace Act, which includes important disclosure requirements and a provision limiting access to American capital markets by foreign oil companies involved in Sudan's oil industry (provisions that were first proposed by the Commission in its 2000 Annual Report).

"The Commission acknowledges the efforts of the President's Special Envoy for peace in Sudan, Sen. John C. Danforth, to relieve humanitarian suffering caused by the brutal 19-year civil war in that country, a war that has killed more the 2 million people and in which religion plays a major role," said Commission Chair Michael K. Young. However, with the delivery of Senator Danforth's report to President Bush, it is absolutely essential that the United States government stay engaged in the peace process, Chairman Young said. In its report, the Commission recommended that peace talks should be based on the Declaration of Principles previously agreed to by Khartoum and opposition groups under the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), including self-determination for the south and a secular government that would ensure religious freedom for all individuals, north and south.

The Commission, in its past two annual reports, found the government of Sudan to be the world's most violent abuser of the right to freedom of religion and belief. The Commission also found that religion is a major factor in Sudan's ongoing civil war, and that religious persecution by the Khartoum regime is intertwined with other human rights and humanitarian violations in Sudan, including aerial bombardment of civilians and of humanitarian facilities, deliberate denial of international humanitarian assistance, abduction of women and children into conditions of slavery, and the forcible displacement of populations from oil-producing areas.

As was graphically demonstrated in the bombing of the World Food Program's feeding center in Western Upper Nile on February 20, 2002, and the April 2002 denial of access for humanitarian relief flights on which almost 2 million people depend, Sudan's government continues to commit genocidal atrocities against civilian populations in the south and central parts of the country.

Over the past three years, the Commission has made a series of recommendations regarding U.S. policy toward Sudan, several of which have been adopted. President Bush prominently raised the situation in Sudan in a major address in May 2001. The President appointed former Senator John Danforth as Special Envoy for Sudan in September 2001. The Administration has also taken several steps to alleviate the humanitarian crisis of the Sudanese people, including designation of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Andrew Natsios as Special Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan and several reforms undertaken by USAID. All of these efforts implement directly or indirectly prior recommendations of this Commission.

The complete text of the Commission's latest report and recommendations on Sudan can be found on the Commission's Web site at www.uscifr.gov; print copies can be obtained by calling the phone number above.

Michael K. Young, Chair

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